(b) whether good quality CASTRATORS are being manufactured and offered by Indian manufacturers at highly reasonable prices;

(c) if so, the reasons for purchasing this product from foreign companies in foreign exchange when the product is easily available indigenously at lower rates;

(d) whether Government propose to constitute an enquiry to check unfair protection to foreing companies and order for bulk purchase of CASTRATORS from Indian manufacturers; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) Under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme National Bull Production Programme (NBPP) implemented by the Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying from 1993-94, State Governments have been advised to procure Burdizzo castrators manufactured in Italy;

(b) to (e) The quality of indigenous castrators has generally been poor. In April 1998, an indigenous manufacturer has approached the Department to get his product tested for quality. Action has been initiated on this request.

Promotion of Bio-Diversity to Increase Productivity

72. DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item captioned "Act now to save Indian Agriculture" which appeared in the Asian Age dated the 6th September, 1998;

(b) if so, the reaction, of Government thereto; and

(c) the steps proposed to promote bio-diversity based on small ecological farm agriculture to attain higher productivity?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICLTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) India is a signatory to the Convention on Bioiagical Diversity which asserts that countries have rights over their bio-resources. A legislation on Biodiversity for conservation of biological divrsity, the substainable use of-its components and the equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of biological resources is under formulation by the Ministry of Environment & Forests.

A legislation on Plant Variety and Farmers' Rights Protection is under formulation by the Department of Agriculture & Coopration which will provide the framework for protecting the rights of breeders in India as also of farming communities. The main objective of the proposed legislation is to protect Plant Breeders' Rights for development of new variety and right of the farmers for further multiplication or exchange of seed of the protected varieties. The proposed legislation will also have provision for suitable compensation to the farmers or rural communities for conservation and maintenance of on-farm diversity and on-farm innovations. The breeder of the new variety will provide suitable compensation to the person or group of persons for their contribution in evolution of such variety.

The Government is seized of the problem of introduction of terminator seed and other genetically engineered planting material and all efforts are being made to ensure that such material does not find entry in the country through legal » channel.

Special Central Assistance to Andhra Pradesh

*73. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH:
DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government of . Andhra Pradesh has requested the Planning Commission for sanction of

special Central Assistance of Rs. 770 crores to that State for the financial year 1998-99 in view of State's share of expenditure on the economic restructuring project approved by World Bank; and

(b) if so, by when the assistance will be sanctioned?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS, THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (SHRI RAM NAIK): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Planning Commission could not accede to the request of the State government for Special Central Assistance. However, in approved scheme of financing of the Annual Plan 1998-99 of the State, the Commission has provided an additional amount of Rs. 400 crore under Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR)-based Net market Borrowing as matching share for implementation of Andhra Pradesh Economic Restructuring Programme. The release of this amount will be contingent upon absorption of World Bank aid by the State.

Conversion of Telephone Exchanges into Electronic Exchanges in Gujarat

*74. SHRIMATI URMILABEN CHIMANBHAI PATEL: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that all telephone exchanges in Gujarat will be converted into electronic exchanges by the year 1999 as per announcement made by MTNL;

(b) if so, the details of exchanges so far converted;

(c) whether the remaining exchanges will be converted by the end of 1999; and

(d) the details of funds i far incurred out of the fund sane ed for the purpose?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA):

(a) Yes, Sir. As per DOT policy all Telephone Exchanges in Gujarat will be converted into Electronic by 1999.

(b) 46500 lines of X-Bar Electro-Mechanical Exchanges has so far been converted into Electronic Exchanges during 1998-99 till 31-10-98 is as per details given below:—

	10000
Navrangpura-II	4500
Jamalpur	10000
Vasna-I	8000
Junagarh	7000
Surcndranagar	7000
Vapi (Valsad)	

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) There is no separate fund sanctioned for this item. Expenditure incurred for replacement so far is approx. Rs. 28 Crores.

Revamping of Planning Commission

*75. SHRI ASHOK MITRA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the number of vacancies yet to be filled in the membership of the Planning Commission;

(b) whether taking advantage of the present situation, Government would consider a drastic restructuring of the organisational pattern of the Commission; and

(c) if so, whether the advice of the Inter-State Council would be sought in this connection?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS, THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (SHRI RAM NAIK): (a) Planning Commission exists as per Government of India Resolution